

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001193

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [YM](#) [DEMOCRATIC](#) [REFORM](#)
SUBJECT: GME: REFORM YEMENI-STYLE

REF: A. SECSTATE 106755
 1B. SANAA 956
 1C. SANAA 1172
 1D. SANAA 1178

Classified By: Ambassador Edmund J. Hull for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Embassy Sanaa continues to engage government, civil society and business leaders on the Greater Middle East draft proposals (ref a). While most interlocutors express opposition to the idea of reform being "imposed from outside the region," the discussion generated by the GMEI appears to have spurred increased attention on reform efforts within Yemen. The acceptance by President Saleh to attend the G-8 summit and to host the pilot microfinance project proposal (refs c and d), along with reform efforts by non-government actors, point towards increased willingness to allow practical considerations to override reluctance stemming from anger over Iraq, the MEPP and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Ongoing reform efforts in Yemen, including economic reform and the parliament's recent increased attention on government corruption, illustrate that the seeds of reform are already growing in Yemen. Few interlocutors have indicated opinions on any of the specific proposals, preferring to make general comments and/or concentrate on what is needed in Yemen. End Summary.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP REACTION

12. (C) Ambassador met with Senior Presidential Advisor and former Prime Minister Dr. Abdul Karim al-Iryani 5/11. Iryani said he sees a "positive evolution" in Arab attitudes towards GMEI that he expects to be reflected in the outcome of the Arab summit May 22-23. He said he understood that Arab Foreign Ministers have agreed on a generally positive position on reform, without necessarily any reference to GMEI. He noted one sticking point has been (and possibly remains) Saudi refusal to endorse multi-party democracy. Iryani noted a "healthy ferment" on reform in Yemen. He raised two concerns on GMEI. He asked if there was "any meat" to the proposals, to which Ambassador noted the microfinance initiative (ref d). He said Arab public opinion continues to perceive GMEI as a dodge for engaging seriously the Palestinian issue, whether or not that is the case.

13. (C) With the exception of Prime Minister Ba Jammal, reactions at the highest levels of the ROYG are indicative of support, with President Saleh accepting the invitation to Sea Island and Deputy Prime Minister Sofan noting support in a written letter (refs c and d). The PM, however, made a statement in the press that the only reform Yemen needs is unification. Comment: The PM is notorious for making statements outside the ROYG norm and is currently under pressure from a corruption scandal. End Comment.

14. (U) The Consultative (or Shura) Council, Yemen's appointed 111-member upper house, held a conference 5/17-18 to discuss the 2003 Arab Human Development report and the GMEI papers that was attended by high-ranking ROYG officials (including DPM Sofan, FM Qirbi and al-Iryani), political parties, NGOs, academics and others.

NGOS AND THINK TANKS ACTIVE ON ISSUE; POLITICAL PARTIES

15. (U) Several NGOs and think tanks have recently held seminars and discussions on reform in Yemen. For example, the Yemen Institute for Democratic Development (YIDD) held a workshop in late April, attended by political parties, journalists and other intellectuals at which the Foreign Minister spoke. The tenor of discussion centered around fueling reform within Yemen while not allowing reform to be imposed by the outside. A prominent think tank leader Dr. Fares al-Saqqaf held discussions with government, opposition and non-partisan Yemenis, with Emboffs invited to listen. Although a few references were made to the absence of Israel-Palestine solutions in the initiative and a rejection of reform from the outside, most of the discussion focused practically on reforms needed within Yemen. Dr. al-Saqqaf told Pol/Econ Deputy that he formed a committee of government, political party and NGO leaders, including Deputy Foreign Minister Mustafa Noman (ref b), to formulate a "National Initiative for Political Reform."

16. (C) Prominent NGO leader Izzedine al-Asbahi of the Human Rights Training and Research Center (HRTC) echoed several other interlocutors when he told Pol/Econ Deputy that he was

concerned that the recent scandals regarding abuses at Abu Ghraib lessened the credibility of the U.S. in pushing for reform, which he saw as a disappointing development for the region.

17. (U) Opposition political parties took the opportunity presented by GMEI to put pressure on the ROYG for continued reform within Yemen, despite most parties publicly rejecting any reform initiatives coming from the West. The Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) is most supportive among political parties. The YSP Secretary General Ali Saleh Obad Muqbil was quoted in a speech given to his Central Committee 5/6 (printed in the party newspaper), "this motion created by international initiatives for reforms in the region provides a valuable opportunity for the will of reform and change at the national levels of all Arab and Muslim states. Therefore, we have to rush to seize the moment to generate a strong pressuring force to accomplish real reforms." YSP leaders in Taiz, the third-largest city in Yemen, echoed this sentiment to Pol/Econ Deputy, noting that outside pressure was useful in their fight for Yemeni reform but also expressing hope that the initiatives would be practical rather than just rhetorical. The second-largest opposition party Islah displayed skepticism at the central level about whether the GME would "end up supporting the regime or the reform seekers," while Islah moderates in Taiz expressed cautious support to Pol/Econ Deputy.

COMMENT

18. (C) Embassy interlocutors seem torn between wanting to support GMEI for their own reasons, i.e., watering the seeds of Yemeni reform, and being reluctant to support any initiative that comes from the outside. Several noted a decided lack of credibility stemming from the recent prison abuse scandal in Iraq and the absence of the Palestinian issue. The widespread exploration of the reform agenda regardless probably stems from a typically Yemeni willingness to be practical, internal and external political calculations and the desire by Yemen to maintain what it perceives as its leadership in political reform in the region. End Comment.

HULL